

VZCZCXRO3611  
OO RUEHPA  
DE RUEHUJA #2517/01 3581554  
ZNY SSSSS ZZH  
O 231554Z DEC 08  
FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4794  
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY 1587  
RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE PRIORITY 0572  
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS PRIORITY 0501  
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY  
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY  
RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002517

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/W, INR/AA  
DOE FOR GEORGE PERSON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/22/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: PRESIDENT TO UNDERGO ANOTHER RENAL  
TRANSPLANT, NAMED NEW ECOWAS CHAIR

REF: ABUJA 2165

Classified By: Ambassador Robin Renee Sanders for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

11. (S) SUMMARY. Ambassador had an opportunity to observe President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua on December 19 at ECOWAS, having a close-up, five minute one-on-one conversation with him following his acceptance of the ECOWAS Chairmanship (septel) to see if she could note any physical changes in his appearance. She also spoke to newly named Minister of Communications and Information Dora Akunyili (strictly protect) on December 22 regarding the President's health. Yar'Adua appeared extremely frail -- weighing about 130-140 lbs at best -- weaker (as he could barely get through his acceptance speech), and with paper thin skin. However, Ambassador noted that he remained intelligent, understanding and aware in his dialogue. Yar'Adua agreed to try to set up a meeting with Ambassador before she departs for annual leave and consultations to discuss bilateral issues of interest to the USG. Meanwhile, Akunyili told Ambassador she expressed her concern to the President and First Lady that she may be asked to lie about the President's health, indicating that she would not compromise herself in such a way. The First Lady told Akunyili that Yar'Adua will travel to Germany for another kidney transplant sometime between December 16 and January 1. We believe Akunyili will be honest in relaying what she knows of the President's health situation, though we are not as confident that she will herself be fully advised of his condition. We consider Akunyili, the former head of the Nigerian Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), a straight shooter and honest broker, and doubt she will find her new ministerial appointment conducive to her style, personality or reputation for being honest. END SUMMARY.

12. (S) Ambassador observed Yar'Adua deliver his acceptance speech at the December 19 ECOWAS Council meeting and had about a 5 minute sidebar with him afterward. Yar'Adua spoke more haltingly than ever as he delivered his acceptance speech (he was named ECOWAS Chair), pausing quite often and coughing his way (more than usual) through his remarks. Ambassador spoke with him for a few minutes in the private exit-way to his car and during the very close face-to-face conversation observed the following:  
-- He appears to weigh only about 130-140 lbs now;  
-- His skin is taunt over his face (almost stretched to the limit) and appears as though if you touched it, it would peel

off;

-- His teeth, particularly the bottom rung are very, very stained (she had not noticed this previously, even during the numerous private meetings the Ambassador has had with him);  
-- His hand shake was weak and his hand was thin, almost like that of a child;  
-- His voice was more faint than before;  
-- His eyes were deep set, with circles under them, but remained focused and still showed intelligence, understanding, and awareness in his dialogue.

¶3. (C) Ambassador noted that Yar'Adua was extremely pleasant, despite the continued complaints we hear from senior members of the GON that he is still smarting over the U.S. position on Ribadu as he believes we support the personality over the EFCC as an institution and that he is disappointed in the US-GON relationship. If this is true, Ambassador notes that there was no indication of this in his reaction or interaction with her. Ambassador asked to see Yar'Adua prior to her leaving for annual leave and consultations to discuss and get his current thinking on a range of issues on the bilateral front, particularly to share with the USG as it transitions to a new administration. Yar'Adua agreed and said he would try to arrange this soon.

¶4. (S) Ambassador later met with newly named Minister of Communications and Information Dora Akunyili on December 22. Akunyili told Ambassador that Yar'Adua will be traveling to Germany for a kidney transplant sometime between December 16 and January 1. Akunyili, who is extremely respected for being honest, tough, and outspoken as head of the National

ABUJA 00002517 002 OF 002

Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), told the Ambassador she went to see Yar'Adua and First Lady Turai Yar'Adua regarding her concern that she may be asked to compromise herself and lie about the President's health. Akunyili said President Yar'Adua told her never to lie and promised he would never ask her to lie for him. If the President was going out of the country for health reasons, Akunyili insisted that she needed to know and that the public needed to know. News of this sort, she contended, needed to be properly managed, and the shroud of secrecy that has thus far covered the Villa on Yar'Adua's health issues was counterproductive.

¶5. (S) Akunyili said it was in this context that the First Lady told her that Yar'Adua is once again close to renal failure and will travel to Germany for another renal transplant (as the first one did not take). Ambassador asked Akunyili if she knew whether the "donor" was the brother of the previous donor. (Note: Reftel reported a conversation on November 1 in which Ambassador was told that Yar'Adua's first donor was Minister of Agriculture Sayyadi Abba Ruma, and that Ruma's brother Jahana had just returned from Germany to see if he was a match for the second transplant. Both are from Yar'Adua's home state of Katsina and are considered cousins of the President. End Note.) Akunyili agreed to keep Ambassador informed of the President's travel plans and his health in general.

¶6. (S) Comment: Akunyili has been a good contact and is known for her personal integrity and high level of commitment. Despite her disappointment at being appointed Minister of Information, it may be a good appointment in terms of flow of information from the Villa. We believe that Akunyili will be upfront about what she knows regarding the President's health -- the real question is whether she will be given the full story by the President and those close to him. Meanwhile, the Ambassador's take on the President's physical appearance is worrisome and our watch words remain -- how long, or if, he can survive. Post will continue to monitor; he still could surprise us all and complete his full term. End Comment.

¶7. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.

